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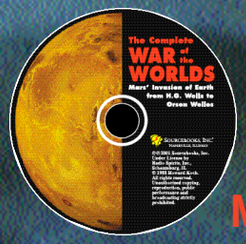
The Complete WAR of the WORLDS

Mars' Invasion of Earth from H.G. Wells to Orson Welles

Includes the Full Text & Original Illustrations of H.G. Wells' Classic



Hear the Actual Terror-Inspiring Broadcast and More on Audio CD

Brian Holmsten & Alex Lubertozzi • Ray Bradbury • Ben Bova • John Callaway
Editors Foreword Afterword Narration

The Complete WAR of the WORLDS

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Naperville, Illinois

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Front cover photos: Orson Welles (upper left), Corbis-Bettmann; from the film *The War of the Worlds*, courtesy of Paramount Pictures. *Back cover photo:* Earth from space (background), Photodisc. *Front flap photo:* Orson Welles and H.G. Wells, Corbis-Bettmann.

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Published by Sourcebooks, Inc.
P.O. Box 4410, Naperville, Illinois 60567-4410
(630) 961-3900
FAX: (630) 961-2168

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The complete war of the worlds: Mars' invasion of Earth from H.G. Wells to Orson Welles / edited by Brian Holmsten and Alex Lubertozzi.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-57071-714-1 (alk. paper)
1. Wells, H.G. (Herbert George), 1866–1946. War of the worlds. 2. Wells, H.G. (Herbert George), 1866–1946—Adaptations. 3. Welles, Orson, 1915–1985—Criticism and interpretation. 4. Science fiction, English—History and criticism. 5. Imaginary wars and battles in literature. 6. War of the worlds (Radio program). 7. Science fiction radio programs. 8. Mars (Planet)—In literature. I. Holmsten, Brian. II. Lubertozzi, Alex.

PR5774.W33 C66 2001
823'.912—dc21

00-066166

Printed and bound in the United States of America
DO 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To H.G. and Orson,
whose unique genius each
helped shape the twentieth century
in remarkable and wonderful ways

I felt the first inkling of a thing that presently grew quite clear in my mind, that oppressed me for many days, a sense of dethronement, a persuasion that I was no longer a master, but an animal among the animals, under the Martian heel.

—H.G. Wells
The War of the Worlds

…Remember, please, for the next day or so, the terrible lesson you learned here tonight.That grinning, glowing,globular invader of your living room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch, and if your doorbell rings and nobody's there, that was no Martian…it's Hallowe'en.

—Orson Welles
"The War of the Worlds"

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THE WAR of the WORLDS
H. G. Wells

Foreword by Ray Bradbury

H.G. Wells, Master of Paranoia

Now consider *The War of the Worlds*, which induces paranoia in its hapless readers and causes listeners a similar madness when Orson changes Wells to Welles, while clamoring ten million radios with invasions.

I witnessed both, I discovered my own fears of far planets and terrible aliens in the August 1927 *Amazing Stories* reprint of *The War of the Worlds*. Fresh out of high school years later, I heard the United States under siege by radio Martians.

Both were delights.

There is nothing like a wholesale statewide destruction to make a boy sit up and eat his spinach.

Delight was mine when I heard half-seen mobs tear passions to tatters the night Orson Welles was truly born.

The Wells novels and the Welles ear-candy beckon the seedling paranoias in most men and boys born needful for power, accomplishments, or destruction.

Women, on the other hand, mind their knitting and say, "Get on with it. While you're being invaded, I'll just make another child to freshen the paranoid stock."

Wells and Welles prepared us for the delusional madness of the past fifty years. In fact, the entire history of the United States in the last half of the twentieth century is exemplified beautifully in Wells' work. Starting with the so-called arrival of flying saucers in the 1950s, we've had a continuation of our mild panic at being invaded by creatures from some other part of the universe. It started with that alien professor who sold hot dogs with saucers of Invaders at the foot of Mt. Palomar. It then ravened up the years with half-baked sightings to end in Roswell and wild true believers who claimed they never met a bug-eyed monster they didn't love.

Dr. Hynek disagreed, and he was the expert on flying saucers hitting the fan, having started the Center for UFO Studies.

People said yes to his truths but snuck off the next day to Bide-a-Wee Martian Shoals in California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

The myths proliferated, all the way from the friendly beasts that invaded Meteor Crater in my *It Came from Outer Space* to the incredible Mother Ship landing in firework illuminations in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. God reaching down to touch Adam's upstretched hand.

So the invasions will never cease. Or, not until we landfall Mars, build towns, and become friendly invaders to the universe. We will arrive in peace and, hopefully, go with God.

We are still playing "The War of the Worlds" on our audiotape machines and imagining it is Halloween 1938 and Nothing Can Save Us except a convenient earth-bourn germ.

When we read H.G. Wells' *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, the story's lunatic hero, Fotheringay, cries, "By God, I will run the world or by God, destroy every man, woman, and child of it." Wells' *Invisible Man* sees himself run amok among stupid non-thinkers to correct their behaviors and longs to destroy dumb things and people who live by stupid laws.

This is the attraction of some of Wells' most famous pieces. We wish we were invisible, we wish we could command the world to pull up its socks or know annihilation. There is grim satisfaction in being a Martian fresh out of its spaceship, come to rule the world or die trying.

So we are all closet paranoids preached to by a paranoid.

Now consider the other outstanding author of science fiction at the turn of the twentieth century. Jules Verne created a mad scientist also, but when you consider Captain Nemo on board his *Nautilus*, out to conquer the world, or his secret self, you are confronted by an amiable lunatic compared to the madmen who inhabit many of H.G. Wells' stories. H.G. Wells' heroes are true villains and dangerous.

But there are no villains in *The War of the Worlds*, only our panics and night dreams, the dark lopside of our numbskull invading the half that stands in full sun. There is no paranoid lunatic at the center of *The War of the Worlds*. Instead, the reader is the one who becomes filled with paranoia. *The War of the Worlds* is a nightmare vision of humanity's conquest—one that inspired paranoia in all its forms throughout the twentieth century. Wells was reacting to the injustice and ignorance of man in his work, while Verne envisioned the wonder of technology. We enjoy them both for different reasons, but they both capture truths about the world, good and bad. It speaks volumes about us that Wells' vision caused the more spectacular impact. And, truth be told, ever since the novel and the broadcast, we are still in the throes of believing that we've been invaded by creatures from somewhere else.

Introduction

"There are no Martians. There are no intelligences on Mars superior to our own in any way comparable. It seems quite likely that there never have been. In fact, the evidence we now have makes it seem likely that there is no life of any kind on Mars and there may not even have been any life on the planet in the past."

—*Isaac Asimov, in an afterword to* The War of the Worlds

On October 30, 1938, Orson Welles took Howard Koch's adaptation of H.G. Wells' classic, *The War of the Worlds*, and convinced more than a million Americans that a Martian army had come to Earth to annihilate the human race. Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre, broadcast coast-to-coast on CBS Radio, simulated a program of dance music ("Ramón Raquello and his orchestra") being interrupted by increasingly alarming and unbelievable newsflashes from Grovers Mill, New Jersey. By the time it became clear what was being reported, men, women, and children in dozens of towns and cities all over the nation fled their homes in terror from objects that existed only in their imagination.

"The War of the Worlds" was a short-lived conflict. The invaders, shot like cannonballs from Mars to remote regions around the globe, decimated most of New Jersey and set half the planet on fire all before the first scheduled program break (about forty minutes). A suspiciously short time frame, one would think. Conspicuous also was CBS News' exclusive on the story.

A number of conditions may help explain America's susceptibility to the hoax—the continuing economic hardships of the Great Depression, Hitler pushing Europe to the brink of war, the Hindenburg explosion of 1937 (the first disaster to be broadcast live), and news of the devastating hurricane that hit the East Coast earlier in the year. People had grown accustomed to hearing bad news, especially, in recent months, in the form of late-breaking newsflashes.

The panic broadcast, as it came to be known, was an experiment in mass delusion set not in a university, but in America's living room. What was it about H.G. Wells' tale that caused so many people to act so irrationally? And what is it about *The War of the Worlds* story that continues to fascinate us?

H.G. Wells published his classic story in 1898, when many in England eyed Germany's growing war machine with the same trepidation that preceded World War II. His book, which predated the Boer War and World War I, foresaw a warfare more mechanized and brutal than any seen before. The idea of refugees fleeing a devastated London must have seemed incredible in that Victorian age; so too would the notion of flying machines and poison gas used as instruments of war. Since its initial publication, publishers around the world have released numerous editions of *The War of the Worlds*, pulp comics serialized it, Hollywood made a movie of it, and in 1978, Jeff Wayne even staged his *Musical Version of The War of the Worlds*, starring Richard Burton. Other radio performances, inspired by the Orson Welles broadcast, have aired at various times and on various stations in the U.S. and abroad. In response to the 1949 "War of the Worlds" broadcast from Quito, Ecuador, enraged townsfolk rioted, ultimately torching the radio studio building and killing several station employees.

Countless others, inspired by H.G.'s book and Orson's broadcast, have created their own take on Earth's invasion from outer space. In the 1940s and

50s, as the Cold War heated up, science fiction came to the fore as a popular movie genre, particularly stories of alien invasion, with films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Thing*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and the 1953 screen version of *The War of the Worlds*. Those movies were the at the fore of the monsters-from-space crop; other fare included *Purple Death from Outer Space*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Killers from Space*, *Flying Disc Man from Mars*, *Zombies of the Stratosphere*, *Devil Girl from Mars*, *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, *Teenagers from Outer Space*, *Mars Needs Women*, and the movie many consider the worst of all time, Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. In 1962, Topps released their "Mars Attacks!" trading cards, which later inspired the Tim Burton film, *Mars Attacks!*

They all owed a debt to the original monsters-from-outer-space epic, H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

And for most of the twentieth century, beings from outer space were cast as villains—bent on destroying our civilization, taking over the planet, and, if possible, having their way with Earth women. Although the science fiction literature was way ahead of Hollywood—Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, which depicted Earthmen as "invaders" of Mars, came out in 1950, and Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, about a human raised by enlightened Martians who returns to earth, was published in 1961—it wasn't until the 1970s and 80s that empathetic extraterrestrials were introduced to audiences in movies like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, and *Starman*. This more enlightened or hopeful view, however, has not eradicated the paranoid view we hold of the outsiders, the malevolent and mysterious *them*.

Arthur C. Clarke, who in 1952 envisioned a race of benevolent aliens in *Childhood's End*, said in a 1969 interview with Howard Koch, "I think that the sort of unmotivated malevolence which is typical of many science fiction stories is unlikely because some of the invaders in space that we've encountered in fiction would simply have destroyed themselves before they got anywhere else." But he went on to say, "…at the same time, one must admit that in a practically infinite universe almost anything is theoretically possible to happen somewhere."

The expectation that aliens would be hostile seems irrational. And it reveals our tendency to xenophobia, our fear of anything alien or different. We tend to project our own fears and hostilities on those who are different until those imaginings become real to us. Which raises an important question: Would anyone have believed the broadcast if the Martians were said to have come in peace?

H H H

In *The War of the Worlds*, the Martians are ultimately defeated by "the humblest thing that God in His wisdom put upon this earth," the bacterium. But seventy-one years later, in Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*, we learn that this cuts both ways, as an extraterrestrial virus, brought to earth by an unmanned satellite, wipes out a small Arizona town in a matter of hours, threatening humankind's very existence. In 1996, when NASA scientist David McKay uncovered fossil evidence of possible bacterial life forms on Mars, the idea of deadly space microbes suddenly seemed less like science fiction. The more technologically adept we become, and the more possibilities we are able to imagine, the more we find to be scared of. We've learned to laugh at our fears, of course, as the movie parody of *Mars Attacks!* and shows like *Third Rock from the Sun* prove. But popular entertainments like *Invasion Earth*, *V*, *The X-Files*, *Roswell*, *Alien Autopsy*, and *Independence Day* remind us that we are still, at heart, paranoid creatures.

Science has advanced at an astounding pace since 1898, a time when the scientific community—unable to imagine relativity or quantum theory—believed there was little left to discover. Breakthroughs in transportation, communications, medicine, biotechnology, computer science, and nuclear physics have changed every aspect of our daily lives. We've shrunken the globe with satellite broadcasting and wireless communications; we've explored space, landing men on the moon and unmanned vehicles on Mars; we've enhanced, automated, and sped

up countless processes with ever-smaller and more powerful computers; we've cloned animals; and we've split the atom, unleashing the power of the sun.

We've only begun to question our place in the universe within the last hundred years and have arrived at no great insight but this: we are either the only intelligent life in the cosmos or we are not. Either scenario is mind-boggling. If we're not alone, that means that someday we may actually have to deal with it. Like relativity or quantum physics, extraterrestrial intelligence is a concept we've only recently become able to imagine. That knowledge forces us to question some long-held assumptions about our place and our purpose. For one, if we're not the masters of the universe, then who is?

THE PANIC BROADCAST

CBS

The Eve of Halloween

"We have so much faith in broadcasting. In a crisis it has to reach all people. That's what radio is here for."

The night before Halloween, known as Mischief Night, or Devil's Night, is the night you might expect the neighborhood kids to soap your windows or T.P. your silver maple. But that's about it. October 30, 1938, was a peaceful Sunday evening, a little foggy in the East, partially obscuring the night skies over the farmlands of New Jersey. This outward calm, however, belied a nation tense with apprehension. The country, still struggling out of the Great Depression, feared the worst in Europe, where Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier were attempting to appease Hitler, as the Nazis annexed the Sudetenland and greedily eyed the rest of Europe. The Munich Pact of September 30, in which Britain and France gave away a substantial chunk of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, had averted a war, but only for so long. One news commentator summed up America's fears best:

> *…It is the opinion of this commentator, that, in spite of all our hopes and our prayers, this new accord, this Munich agreement, will not, no matter how many times and with what apparent sincerity he assures us otherwise, I repeat, will not satisfy the ambitions of Adolf Hitler….I tell you that this man is drunk with success. And I tell you that his government is barbaric and inhuman. And that he will never rest until all of Europe, and perhaps more, is under that government…*

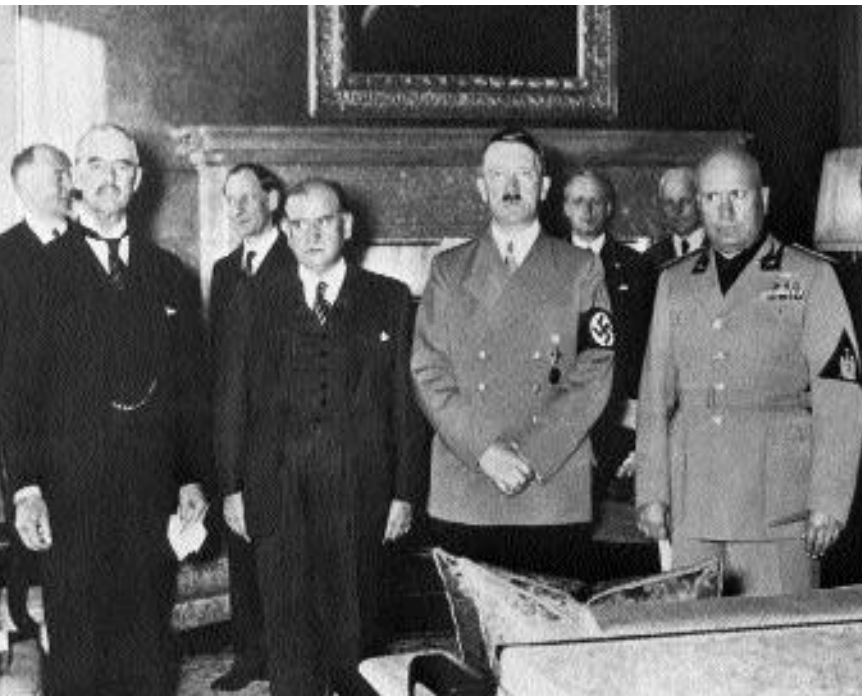
President Roosevelt had sent a telegram to Hitler and the president of Czechoslovakia three days prior to the Munich settlement, begging

them to continue negotiations rather than resort to arms. In the end, the Czechs were not consulted on their country's dismemberment. While America's role remained uncertain, Americans grew worried as radio news flashes about the situation in Europe regularly interrupted programming.

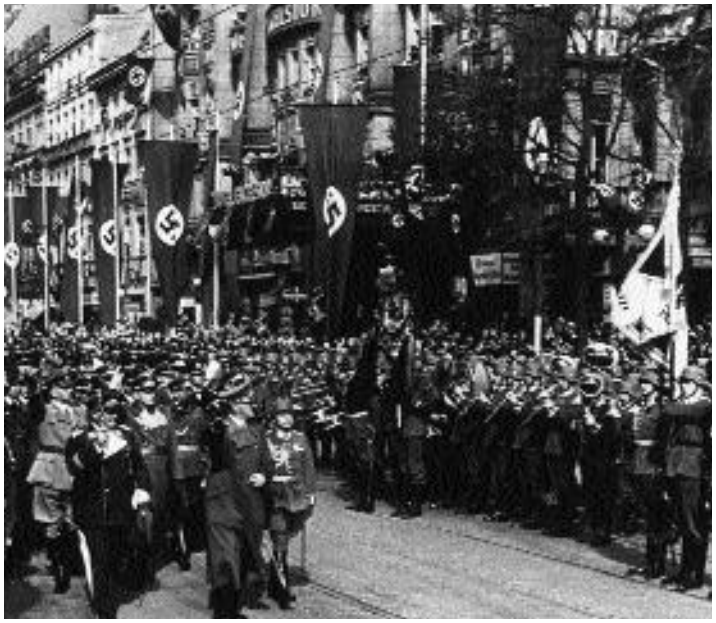
For more than thirty million of these radio listeners, the top-rated *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, starring Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, was the lighthearted distraction they needed.

A ventriloquist act. On the radio.

The Mercury Theatre on the Air, produced by twenty-three-year-old Orson Welles and the elder, Bucharest-born, former grain merchant John Houseman, posted a miserable 3.6 Crossley rating, compared to *Chase and Sanborn*'s 34.7 rating. But, about twelve minutes after eight, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy's act broke for a musical interlude with Nelson Eddy singing the "Neopolitan Love Song," and a large chunk of the audience switched stations to hear what else was on (the first noteworthy instance of zapping, or "channel-surfing"), only to find a CBS news correspondent announcing on WABC in New York:



Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini at the Munich Conference, September 30, 1938



Hitler and Hermann Göring lead a victory procession into Czechoslovakia, after the Sudetenland was ceded to the Nazis, October 10, 1938.

> *Ladies and gentlemen, this is Carl Phillips again, at the Wilmuth farm, Grovers Mill, New Jersey.... Well, I...hardly know where to begin, to paint for you a word picture of the strange scene before my eyes, like something out of a modern* Arabian Nights. *Well, I just got here. I haven't had a chance to look around yet. I guess that's it. Yes, I guess that's the...thing, directly in front of me, half buried in a vast pit. Must have struck with terrific force. The ground is covered with splinters of a tree it must have struck on its way down. What I can see of the...object itself doesn't look very much like a meteor, at least not the meteors I've seen. It looks more like a huge cylinder....*

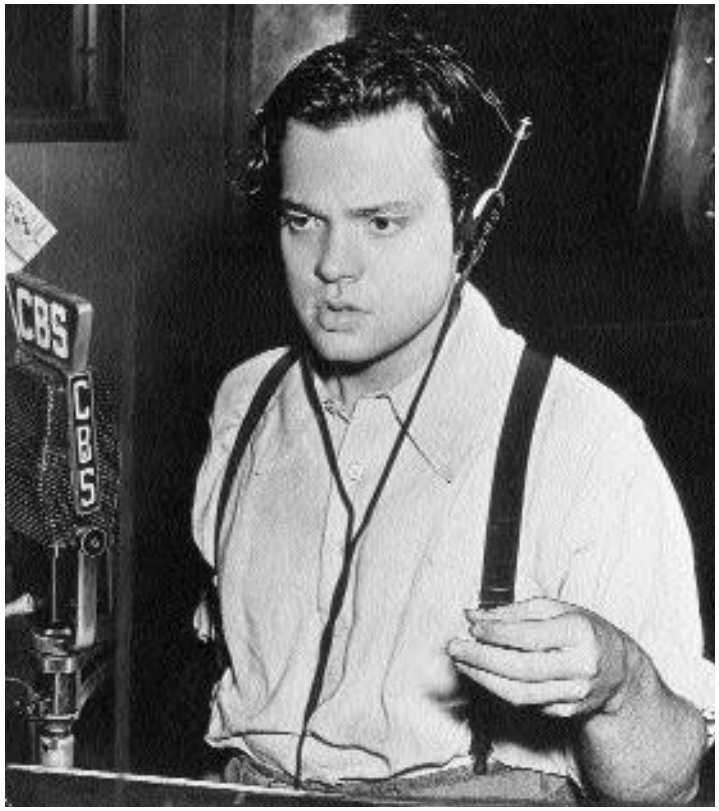
This curious but arresting description kept many a listener's rapt attention. (It was later estimated by the Hooper ratings service that about 12 percent of those who had been listening to Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, about four million listeners, switched to CBS at the break.) The "reporter," Carl Phillips, accompanied by the fictional Princeton astronomer, Professor Pierson, went on to describe the tentacled, squid-like Martian as it emerged from the capsule. "It's as large as a bear and it glistens like wet leather....I can hardly force myself to keep looking at it. The eyes are black and gleam like a

serpent. The mouth is V-shaped with saliva dripping from its rimless lips that seem to quiver and pulsate."

And then it got worse.

Phillips called the play-by-play as the Martians unleashed their horrible heat ray on the crowd that had gathered, and eventually on Phillips himself, as the signal went dead for what must have seemed a very long time. There was apparent confusion back at the station, while they filled the dead air with a short, but ominous piano interlude of "Claire de Lune." Bulletins followed detailing the death toll at Grovers Mill. "Brigadier General Montgomery Smith" placed half of New Jersey under martial law. Units of Red Cross emergency workers were said to be dispatched to the area. Ironically, in hindsight, "Harry McDonald," the fictitious vice president of operations, announced:"In view of the gravity of the situation, and believing that radio has a definite responsibility to serve in the public interest at all times, we are turning over our facilities to the state militia at Trenton." Finally, from the New York studio, came the unequivocal announcement that encapsulated the lie at the heart of the show:

On the night of October 30, 1938, more than thirty-two million people tuned in to hear what was on the radio.



Orson Welles broadcasting on CBS radio

> *Ladies and gentlemen, I have a grave announcement to make. Incredible as it may seem, both the observations of science and the evidence of our eyes lead to the inescapable assumption that those strange beings who landed in the Jersey farmlands tonight are the vanguard of an invading army from the planet Mars....*

Surprisingly, or perhaps *not* surprisingly given the realism of the reportage, a large portion of the radio audience never bothered to switch back to Charlie McCarthy to check the authenticity of CBS' broadcast.

As the Martians marched toward New York, easily defeating the Army, destroying lines of communication, and releasing black clouds of deadly gas over the countryside, people who hadn't been to church that morning prayed with the fervor of the born-again. When an unnamed "Secretary of the Interior" came on the air to urge Americans to remain calm and "in the meantime placing our faith in God...so that we may confront this destructive adversary with a nation united, courageous, and consecrated to the preservation of human

supremacy on this earth," it was impossible not to notice the uncanny resemblance of the speaker's voice to that of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Women wept in front of their radios; so did their husbands. Everywhere, people ran into the streets, unsure where to go or what to do. Many took to their cars, speeding around like mad and covering their faces with wet towels to protect themselves from the gas. In Newark, traffic cops watched dumbfounded as dozens of automobiles careened through intersections, heedless of stoplights, pedestrians, or other motorists. Panicked listeners tied up phone lines, calling their loved ones to warn them or just to say good-bye, and jamming the switchboards of radio stations, newspapers, and police headquarters. Those who didn't get through reasoned that it was the Martians who were responsible.

An Alvin Correco drawing illustrating the devastating effect of the Martian heat ray

Grovers Mill in 1938, ground zero for the Martian invasion

Of the more than six million estimated listeners, 1.7 million were believed to take the radio play as fact, and 1.2 million panicked, according to a study conducted by a *real* Princeton professor, Hadley Cantril, and published in his 1940 book, *Invasion from Mars*. Most failed to check the veracity of the Martian invasion by either checking the radio program listings in the paper or switching channels. All somehow missed the announcement at the beginning of the show that it was a dramatization of "The War of the Worlds." By the first break and second announcement, most had stopped listening to the radio and were off panicking somewhere out of earshot.

Near Grovers Mill, ground zero for the Martian invasion, the panic was probably most immediate. The fire chief of Cranbury, five miles from Grovers Mill, received dozens of calls reporting fires in the woods set by the Martian heat rays. He spent most of the night responding to nonexistent fires set by nonexistent alien invaders. In the course of chasing down these imaginary conflagrations, he was able to observe farmers, armed with shotguns, roaming the countryside looking for Martians or for the militia, which was supposed to have

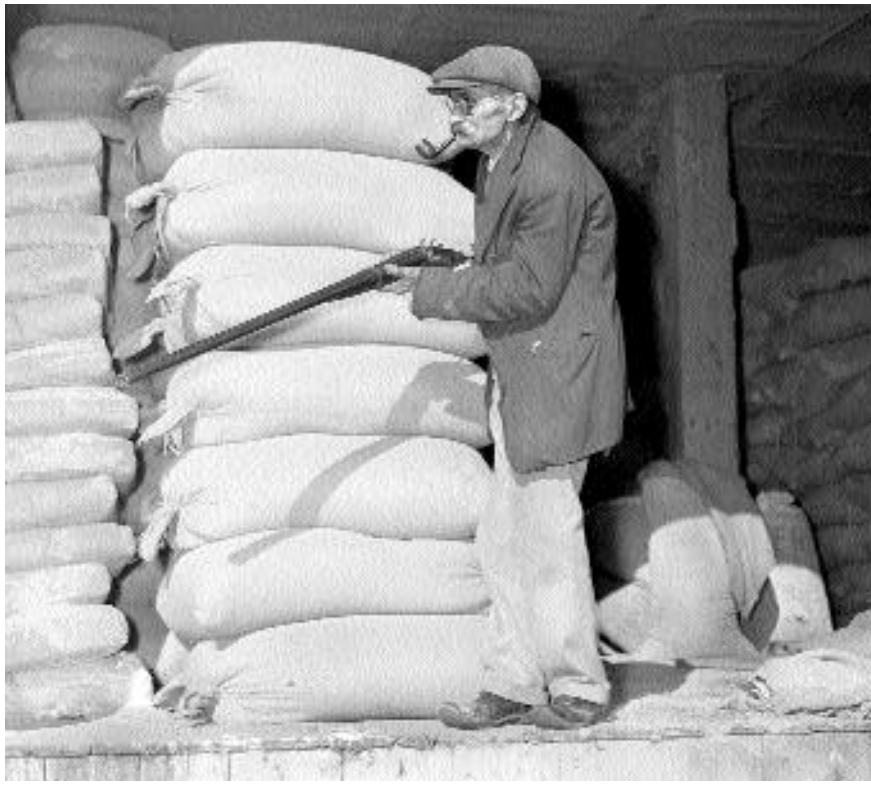
The water tower once mistaken for a Martian, as it looks today

been deployed to the area to fend off the "intruders." Later, more than a hundred state troopers descended on the area to calm the local residents and disarm the "volunteers" before anybody got hurt.

Another local to the Grovers Mill area was in such a hurry to drive off to reach his wife's family in Pennsylvania, he neglected to open the garage door first and, despite his wife's screamed warning, drove right through the door with a crunch, saying back to his wife, "Well, we won't be needing it anymore."

Another neighbor, who had emptied a bottle of whiskey while listening to the broadcast, decided that his chow dog would be much safer in its kennel at the side of the house. Grabbing the animal, he rushed outside and attempted to fling the chow over the fence into the kennel. Terrified and confused at his master's strange behavior, the dog clamped down on the man's sleeve with his jaw and held on for dear life. The man swung the dog over his head several times until the sleeve, with chow attached, ripped off. The man then proceeded to drive to his brother's house, yank him out of a peaceful slumber, and take him on a wild, drunken ride, which ended when Welles came on to say that it was all just a play. What the brother then did to the man was not reported.

Some of the Grovers Mill locals actually fired shots at what they believed to be one of the Martians rising up on its giant metal legs. It turned out to be a tall, fanless, and most likely unarmed water tower and windmill.This "Martian" still stands today in the backyard of a house, across the street from the grist Mill that gave the community its name. The present-day owner of the Martian water tower (it overlooks a swimming pool now), Catherine Shrope-Mok, reported that the ones who were primarily shooting at the water tower in 1938 were in fact the neighbors from across the road, "who you'd think would know better," she said, "since they saw it every day." The famous water tower actually receives visitors from around the country and as far away as Scandinavia and Japan every Halloween, according to Ms. Shrope-Mok.



The day after the panic, a New York Daily News *photographer got seventy-six-year-old William Dock to recreate his armed resistance to the Martian invaders in a staged pose.*

DAILY NEWS FINAL

FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.

"War" Victim

"I Didn't Know"

New York Daily News *front page*

That same night, a few miles away, a couple of other real Princeton professors, Arthur Buddington, chairman of the geology department, and geologist Harry H. Hess, spent the better part of the evening searching for the object reported on the broadcast—"something of an unusual nature, possibly a meteorite"—which had supposedly landed in Grovers Mill. According to the *Trenton Evening Times*, "Armed with a geologist's hammer and a flashlight, they began a systematic tapping of rocks to determine if they were of earthly or heavenly origin." The two no doubt endured quite a bit of razzing from their colleagues for their expedition.

In Newark, those who weren't racing their cars around the streets with their faces covered by wet rags were busy spilling out into the streets, taking their wordly possessions with them, or having conniption fits. One hospital in Newark treated fifteen men and women for shock and hysteria; the parents of three children called the hospital to say they were coming to take their kids and leaving the city. New Jersey national guardsmen flooded the armories of Essex and Sussex counties with calls asking when and where to report. Hundreds of doctors and nurses offered their services to the Newark police to aid the "injured," while city officials made emergency plans. The governor of Pennsylvania even offered to send troops to New Jersey to help quell the Martian insurgency.

In New York, the source of the broadcast, the *New York Times* reported that the Dixie Bus Terminal was ready to change its schedule upon confirmation of "news reports" on an "accident" near Princeton on their New Jersey route. When Dorothy Brown at the terminal sought verification,she was refused by the person on the other end of the line, who said, "The world is coming to an end, and I have a lot to do."

At the wedding reception of Rocco and Connie Cassamassina in uptown Manhattan, a group of latecomers arrived, visibly shaken by something. One of them took the microphone from the singer in the dance band and announced to the party that the city was being invaded by creatures from outer space. After the initial bewildered reaction, panic set in and guests started running for their coats and leaving. Connie begged the few people who were left not to leave with tears in her eyes. Rocco grabbed the microphone and started singing hymns to the handful of stunned guests who remained.

A young college student reported to radio play scriptwriter Howard Koch:

> *My girlfriend and I were at a party in the Village. Someone turned on the radio. It was just when the Martians were spraying the people at Grovers Mill with the heat ray. At first we couldn't believe it was happening, but it was so real we stayed glued to the radio, getting more scared every minute. My girl began to cry. She wanted to be with her family. The party broke up in a hurry, our friends scattering in all directions. I drove like crazy up Sixth Avenue. I don't know how fast—fifty, maybe sixty miles an hour. The traffic cops at the street crossings just stared at us, they couldn't believe their eyes, whizzing right past them going through the red lights. I didn't care if I got a ticket. It was all over anyway. Funny thing, none of*

the cops chased us. I guess they were too flabbergasted. My apartment was on the way, so I stopped just long enough to rush in and shout up to my father that the Martians had landed and we were all going to be killed and I was taking my girl home. When we got to her place, her parents were waiting for us. My father had called them. Told them to hold me there until he could send a doctor as I'd gone out of my mind.

A senior in a large eastern college, returning from a date with his girlfriend, heard the broadcast in his car and returned to save her. "One of the first things I did was to try to phone my girl in Poughkeepsie, but the lines were all busy, so that just confirmed my impression that the thing was true. We started driving back to Poughkeepsie. We had heard that Princeton was wiped out and gas and fire were spreading over New Jersey, so I figured there wasn't anything to do—we figured our friends and families were all dead. I made the forty-five miles in thirty-five minutes and didn't even realize it. I drove right through Newburgh and never even knew I went through it. I don't know why we weren't killed....The gas was supposed to be spreading up north. I didn't have any idea exactly what I was fleeing from, and that made me all the more afraid....I thought the whole human race was going to be wiped out—that seemed more important than the fact that we were going to die."

The authorities were often of little help to panicked listeners. In some cases, as one listener reported, they probably made things worse:

I immediately called up the Maplewood police and asked if there was anything wrong. They answered, "We know as much as you do. Keep your radio tuned in and follow the announcer's advice. There is no immediate danger in Maplewood." Naturally, after that I was more scared than ever.

New Jersey State Police had to reassure its officers: "WABC broadcast as drama re: this section being attacked by residents of Mars. Imaginary affair." And New York police eventually sent out the following message to its force: "Station WABC informs us that the broadcast just concluded over that station was a dramatization of a play. No cause for alarm."

The terror was not confined to New Jersey and New York, however. One man in Pittsburgh came home just in time to save his wife, who was in the bathroom holding a bottle of poison in her hand and screaming, "I'd rather die this way than like that!"

Joseph Hendley, a small-town Midwesterner, recounted his evening:

That Halloween Boo sure had our family on its knees before the program was half over. God knows but we prayed to Him last Sunday. It was a lesson in more than one thing to us. My mother went out and looked for Mars. Dad was hard to convince or skeptical or sumpin', but he even got to believing it....Aunt Grace, a good Catholic, began to pray with Uncle Henry. Lily got sick to her stomach. I don't know what I did exactly, but I know I prayed harder and more earnestly than ever before. Just as soon as we were convinced that this thing was real, how pretty all things on Earth seemed; how soon we put our trust in God.

The New York Times.

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NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1938.

Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact

Many Flee Homes to Escape 'Gas Raid From Mars'—Phone Calls Swamp Police at Broadcast of Wells Fantasy

A wave of mass hysteria seized thousands of radio listeners throughout the nation between 8:15 and 9:30 o'clock last night when a broadcast of a dramatization of H. G. Wells's fantasy, "The War of the Worlds," led thousands to believe that an interplanetary conflict had started with invading Martians spreading wide death and destruction in New Jersey and New York

and radio stations here and in other cities of the United States and Canada seeking advice on protective measures against the raids.

The program was produced by Mr. Welles and the Mercury Theatre on the Air over station WABC and the Columbia Broadcasting System's coast-to-coast network, from 8 to 9 o'clock.

The radio play, as presented, was to simulate a regular radio pro-

The panic soon spread all over the United States. A Warner Brothers studio executive later confided to Koch his reaction:

> *My wife and I were driving through the redwood forest when the broadcast came over our car radio. At first it was just New Jersey, but soon the things were landing all over, even in California. There was no escape. All we could think of was to try to get back to L.A. to see our children once more and be with them when it happened. We went right by gas stations, but I forgot we were low in gas. In the middle of the forest, our gas ran out. There was nothing to do. We just sat there holding hands expecting any minute to see those Martian monsters appear over the tops of the trees. When Orson said it was a Halloween prank, it was like being reprieved on the way to the gas chamber.*

One small Southwestern college reported the following:

> *The girls in the sorority houses and dormitories huddled around their radios trembling and weeping in each other's arms. They separated themselves from their friends only to take their turn at the telephones to make long distance calls to their parents, saying goodbye for what they thought might be the last time. This horror was shared by older and more experienced people—instructors and supervisors in the university. Terror-stricken girls, hoping to escape from the Mars invaders, rushed to the basement of the dormitory. A fraternity boy, frantic with fear, threw off dormitory regulations when he sought out his girlfriend and started for home. Another boy rushed into the street to warn the town of the invasion.*

In the small town of Concrete, Washington, the local power failed at the exact moment when the Martians in the play were disabling communication and power lines around the U.S. The result, of course, was mass hysteria as people fled into the darkened streets, cut off from any news source that might calm their fears.

Chicago newspapers and radio stations were flooded with calls from worried listeners; in St. Louis, people gathered outside to discuss what to do about the "invaders"; in San Francisco and New Orleans, the general impression was that New Jersey had been laid waste by the Martians and that their machines were heading west. In Providence, Rhode Island, the office of the *Providence Journal* was swamped with hysterical phone calls asking for information about the "invasion," and many called the power company to urge them to shut off power so that the city would not be seen by the Martians. Similar reports of panic reactions came from Baltimore, Atlanta, Birmingham, Indianapolis, Richmond, Memphis, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and Salt Lake City. In Hollywood, in a story Orson Welles loved to repeat often, actor John Barrymore, in a fit of panic, released his ten beloved Great Danes, bellowing to the poor creatures, "The world is finished, fend for yourselves!"

In churches around the country, evening services became "end of the world" prayer meetings. In the South, where fundamental Christianity and apocalyptic

THE CHICAGO DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1938.

U. S. Probing Radio Fantasy Which Terrorized Listeners

RADIO DRAMA SPREADS PANIC

Caroline Cantor, WPA worker, who heard the radio in New York and which she heard the announcement of "panic in Times Square" in the dramatization of H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds" broadcast last night. Twelve stations, she noted in the news, falling and breaking her arm.

Orson Welles, Wunderkind Broadway theatrical prodigy, who he had dramatized and staged over the Columbia Broadcasting System a non-Halloween fantasy of an invasion by the United States by [illegible] Mars.

H. G. Wells, author of the fantasy, dramatization of which caused panic among radio listeners in the United States and Canada. Wells, [illegible] of England. "I gave no permission for this dramatization," said Wells today.

T IN DAYTON CITED FOR CONTEMPT IN SCHOOL CLOSING

theology made an end-of-the-world scenario less outlandish, the panic tended to be more pronounced than in other regions. "I knew the forces of God were overwhelming us," said Miss Jane Dean, a fifty-seven-year-old spinster with firm religious convictions, "and we were being given punishment at last for our evil ways."

Other reactions culled by the Hadley Cantril study and published in *Invasion From Mars* revealed the depth of some people's faith in the face of death:

> *The Bible says that the first time the end of the world was by flood and the next time it will be by fire, and that went through my mind.*

> *We tuned in to another station and heard some church music. I was sure a lot of people were worshiping God while waiting for their death.*

The power of suggestion to inspire hallucinations in otherwise sane people cannot be underestimated.

New York World-Telegram

U. S. Investigates Radio Drama of Invasion By Martians That Threw Nation Into Panic

H. G. Wells Indignant Over Liberties Taken With His Book

Scare Analyzed By Psychologists

They Say Panic Show Lack of Imagination

Compromise Ends Chinese Pair's Fast

Gubernatorial Race Almost in Deadlock

Big Up-State Plurality

'A Million Indians Rushed Him—'

Bid to France Forecasts Pact

RADIO SCREEN STAGE

VARIETY

25¢

Vol. 122 No. 3 NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1938 64 PAGES

RADIO DOES U. S. A FAVOR

PREPAREDNESS VS. PANIC ISSUE

Strategists Taking Cognizance of That Sunday Night Broadcast—Dramatizes Vividly the Lack of Common Sense Should a Real Air Attack Ever Occur—Anti-Radio Press Overplayed It, for Its Own Reasons

ELLIOTT'S ANGLES

Residents of Riverside reported to baffled police seeing Martian machines poised on the Jersey Palisades, preparing to cross the Hudson on their way to attack New York City. "I stuck my head out of the window and thought I could smell the gas," said one interviewee afterward. "And it felt as though it was getting hot, like fire was coming."

"I looked out of my window and saw a greenish-eerie light which I was sure came from a monster," admitted another. "Later on it proved to be the lights in the maid's car."

The *New York Times* reported on patrolman John Morrison, who was on duty at Bronx Police headquarters when all of the phone lines lit up. The first call he answered started with a man who informed him, "They're bombing New Jersey!" "How do you know?" Morrison asked. "I heard it on the radio," the man replied, "then I went to the roof and I could see the smoke from the bombs, drifting over toward New York. What shall I do?"

A woman in Boston said she could actually see the fire as described on the radio; other families in Boston congregated on rooftops and imagined they could see a red glow against the southern night sky, as the Martians burned New York; some people told of hearing machine

gun fire or the "swish" sound of the Martians. A man even climbed atop a Manhattan building with binoculars and claimed seeing "the flames of battle."

Other listeners found a variety of reasons to believe what they were hearing:

I believed the broadcast as soon as I heard the professor from Princeton and the officials in Washington. I knew it was an awfully dangerous situation when all those military men were there and the secretary of state spoke.

If so many of those astronomers saw the explosions, they must have been real. They ought to know.

I was most inclined to believe the broadcast when they mentioned places like South Street and the Pulaski Highway.

I looked out of the window and everything looked the same as usual, so I thought it hadn't reached our section yet.

12 X THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1938

RADIO CHALLENGES PLAYWRIGHTS TO TRY NEW TRICKS

EXPLORING IN DRAMA

MacLeish, Poetic Dramatist, Talks About The Task of Writing a Broadcast Play

A New York Times *story on radio drama, which ran on the day of the broadcast, clearly announces that evening's program.*

Even some regular listeners to Orson Welles were fooled. Sarah Jacob, from Illinois, complained:

They should have announced that it was a play. We listened to the whole thing and they never did [they did, of course, four times—once at the beginning, twice during the commercial break, and then again at the end]. I was very much afraid. When it was over, we ran to the doctor's to see if he could help us get away. Everybody was out in the street, and somebody told my husband it was just a play. We always listen to Orson Welles, but we didn't imagine this was it. If we hadn't found out it was a play almost as soon as it was over, I don't know what we'd have done.

The Mercury Theatre broadcast was well advertised and announced in the radio program listings. The *New York Times* even ran a full-page story that day on radio drama, featuring a photograph of Orson Welles and the other Mercury actors in rehearsal: "…tonight's show is 'The War of the Worlds,' by H.G. Wells," it points out. Perhaps it says something about the relative impact of print media to broadcast.Then again, as another listener admitted, "I listened from the very beginning. I always listen to the Mercury Theatre. But when the flashes came, I thought they were really interrupting the play."

Some who took the broadcast as fact found a silver lining:

My only thought involving myself as a person in connection with it was a delight that if it spread to Stelton I would not have to pay the butcher's bill.

The broadcast had us all worried, but I knew it would at least scare ten years' life out of my mother-in-law.

My girlfriend pointed out to me that I had passed a couple of red lights, and I answered, "What's the difference? If I get a ticket, it will only be burned anyway."

It was the thrill of a lifetime—to hear something like that and think it's real.

Many believed the Martians were actually either Germans or Japanese, a more plausible interpretation of the broadcast, in retrospect. Sylvia Holmes, a Newark housewife, said, "We listened, getting more and more excited. We all felt that the world was coming to an end....I wanted to be together with my husband and nephew so we could all die together. So I ran out of the house. I guess I didn't know what I was doing. I stood on the corner waiting for a bus, and I ran out to get it. People saw how excited I was and tried to quiet me, but I kept on saying over and over again to everybody I met: 'Don't you know New Jersey is destroyed by the Germans—it's on the radio.' I was all excited, and I knew that Hitler didn't appreciate President Roosevelt's telegram a couple of weeks ago. While the U.S. thought everything was settled, they came down unexpected. The Germans are so wise, they were in something like a balloon, and when the balloon landed—that's when they announced the explosion—the Germans landed. When I got home, my husband wasn't there so I rushed in next door and warned the neighbors that the world was coming to an end."

Her neighbors eventually persuaded her to calm down and go home. She wasn't convinced they were out of danger, though, but still found an excuse to raid the fridge. "I found my nephew had come home and gone to bed," she said. "I woke him up. I looked in the icebox and saw some chicken left from Sunday dinner that I was saving for Monday night dinner. I said to my nephew, 'We may as well eat this chicken—we won't be here in the morning.'"

Other listeners also translated what they were hearing into something that made sense in the context of looming war:

I knew it was the Germans trying to gas all of us. When the announcer kept calling them people from Mars, I just thought he was ignorant and didn't know yet that Hitler had sent them all.

The announcer said a meteor had fallen from Mars, and I was sure he thought that, but in the back of my head I had the idea that the meteor was just a camouflage. It was really an airplane like a Zeppelin that looked like a meteor, and the Germans were attacking us with gas bombs. The airplane was built to look like a meteor just to fool people.

The Jews are being treated so terribly in some parts of the world, I was sure something had come to destroy them in this country.

I felt it might be the Japanese—they are so crafty.

One person actually welcomed annihilation from Mars rather than suffer existence under fascism: "I was looking forward with some pleasure to the destruction of the entire human race and the end of the world.If we have fascist domination of the world, there is no purpose in living anyway."

While Rome Burned

Ray Collins, the Mercury actor playing the last CBS reporter, described the Martian machines crossing the Hudson river, "like a man wading through a brook." The poison black cloud advanced on Manhattan, engulfing Times Square, then Fifth Avenue, until a terrible silence again interrupted the horror show. The last voice heard was the pathetic plea of a shortwave operator coming through the air from some remote outpost: "2X2L calling CQ…2X2L calling CQ…New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone…"

Several minutes earlier, CBS broadcasting supervisor Davidson Taylor had received a phone call in the control room and hurriedly left the studio. By the time he returned, "pale as death," according to producer John Houseman, the damage was done, and the players in the studio, Houseman, and Welles were about to learn just what kind of mischief they'd perpetrated. Taylor entered the booth with orders to interrupt the show immediately and announce that the program was fiction. Houseman refused to let him stop the broadcast before the break, insinuating himself between Welles and Taylor. Within five minutes, they reached the first scheduled program break, anyway. Civilization's last gasp was followed by Dan Seymour reminding the portion of the audience that hadn't fled in terror with towels on their heads that this was in fact a Mercury Theatre presentation of "The War of the Worlds."

The panic had begun in New Jersey, spread north and west, and finally throughout the country. Taylor had heard horror stories about affiliate reactions to the show. In an appropriate reverse-hoax, Welles and Houseman were informed that casualties were mounting across the nation. Mobs trampled people under foot in their haste to escape the Martians; people were committing suicide rather than suffer the death ray or black cloud.

The show continued. But the rest of the play was straight drama, with Welles portraying a ragged Professor Pierson, roaming the desolate New Jersey countryside and describing the human wreckage. From his journal, now relating the tale in flashback, he told how the Martians succumbed to everyday bacteria to which their bodies had no resistance. Welles closed the show with a prepared sign-off/apology that gives a hint as to what effect he thought the broadcast might have:

Welles after the broadcast, as if to say, "I had no idea."

> *This is Orson Welles, ladies and gentlemen, out of character to assure you that "The War of the Worlds" has no further significance than as the holiday offering it was intended to be. The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying "Boo!" Starting now, we couldn't soap all your windows and steal all your garden gates by tomorrow night…so we did the next best thing. We annihilated the world before your very ears, and utterly destroyed the Columbia Broadcasting System. You will be relieved, I hope, to learn that we didn't mean it, and that both institutions are still open for business. So good-bye everybody, and remember, please, for the next day or so, the terrible lesson you learned tonight. That grinning, glowing, globular invader of your living room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch, and if your doorbell rings and nobody's there, that was no Martian…it's Hallowe'en.*

The Aftermath

The Mercury Theatre signed off the air. But the terror was just beginning for Welles and Houseman.As the final theme was playing, the phone in the control room rang. It turned out to be the mayor of a large Midwestern city. "He is screaming for Welles," recalled Houseman. "Choking with fury, he reports mobs in the streets of the city, women and children huddled in churches, violence and looting…" Welles quickly hung up as police burst into the studio, confiscating scripts and segregating the actors. Kept alone in a room for a time, the police eventually threw Welles and Houseman to the press. The print reporters, resentful of the business radio had taken away from their papers, were out for blood. How many deaths have you heard of? they asked, implying, as Houseman told it, "that they knew of thousands." Had they heard of the fatal stampede in the New Jersey hall? Did they know about all of the traffic deaths and suicides? The way the reporters put their questions, Houseman assumed that the ditches were choked with corpses.

When they were later released by a back exit into mid-town Manhattan, Houseman found it "suprising to see life going on as usual in the midnight streets." Of course, no one had died because of the broadcast.There were a few bumps and bruises. But most of the bruises were to the egos of the embarrassed and sheepish listeners who had been taken in by the story.

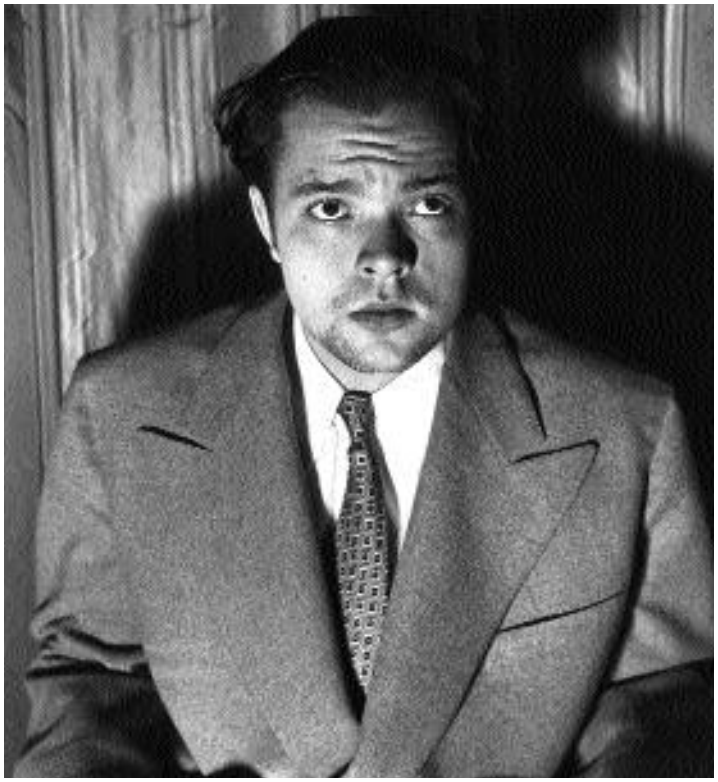
Welles surrounded by reporters, photographers, and film cameras at a press conference the day after the broadcast

Howard Koch had listened to the broadcast in his apartment, unaware of the panic it was causing. Exhausted from another hectic week of writing scripts for Welles and Houseman, he slept so soundly that he didn't hear the phone ring later that night when Houseman called him to break the news. Monday morning, he walked down Seventy-second Street on his way to get his hair cut:

> *Catching ominous snatches of conversation with words like "invasion" and "panic," I jumped to the conclusion that Hitler had invaded some new territory and that the war we all dreaded had finally broken out.*
>
> *When I anxiously questioned the barber, he broke into a broad grin, "Haven't you heard?" and he held up the front page of a morning newspaper with the headline "Nation in Panic from Martian Broadcast."*

So Koch, who had written the radio play, became in a way a victim himself of Welles' "Hallowe'en prank."

Welles answers a reporter's question at the press conference on October 31,1938



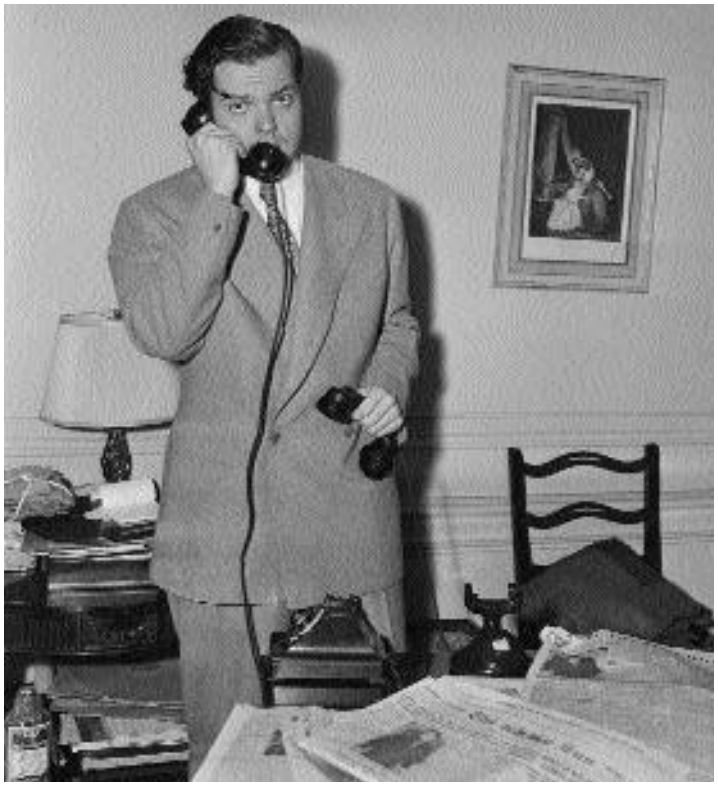
Welles, "looking like an early Christian saint"

At a press conference later that day, Welles denied knowing about the panic during the broadcast. "Looking like an early Christian saint," as he later described himself, he held the roomful of reporters in the palm of his hand as he claimed utter amazement that the show could be taken as fact by anyone. What the doe-eyed, innocent Welles failed to mention was that it was he who urged Mercury player Kenny Delmar to play the part of the Secretary of the Interior as Roosevelt. "I was not supposed to impersonate the president," recalled Delmar, "that order came down from the network brass. When Orson came in to direct the dress rehearsal, he said, 'Oh Kenny, you know what I want.' So every fifth word was done as FDR so it gave a very strong impression of the president." John Houseman, who later denied that they intentionally did this (Houseman, like Welles, gave conflicting versions of the story depending on whom he was talking to and when), once admitted in an interview, "That was the only naughty thing we did that night. Everything else was just good radio."

One of the reporters asked Welles, "Were you aware of the terror such a broadcast would stir up?"

"Definitely not," he answered. "The technique I used was not original with me. It was not even new. I anticipated nothing unusual." Welles was correct about the technique having been used before. On January 17, 1926, in a BBC radio broadcast from Edinburgh, Scotland, Father Ronald Knox described in a false news report how a fictitious unemployed mob in London had sacked the National Gallery, blown up Big Ben, hanged the Minister of Traffic to a tramway post, and demolished the Houses of Parliament. The "newscast" ended with the destruction of the BBC's London headquarters. Occurring during a period of unusual labor strife, days before the general strike, panicked listeners called the radio station, newspapers, and police to find out what was happening and what, if anything, they could do.

If Welles knew about the BBC panic, it strains credulity to think that he wouldn't have expected a similar reaction to his own broadcast. In fact, according to Joseph Bulgatz in *Ponzi Schemes, Invaders from Mars & More Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, Welles had led up to the realistic newsflash style of "The War of the Worlds." He had used a narrator, the well-known political commentator H.V. Kaltenborn, in the first *Mercury Theatre on the Air* fall broadcast, "Julius Caesar." Kaltenborn's recognizable style and voice added a dimension of realism and immediacy to Shakespeare's drama. In addition, says Bulgatz, Welles listened to Archibald MacLeish's *Air Raid* on the Columbia Workshop just days prior to the panic broadcast. In it,an announcer stood on the roof of a tenement describing an everyday peaceful scene when, suddenly, the sounds of bombing aircraft, explosions, and screams interrupted the calm. Another meaningful coincidence happened a month earlier, on September 25, when a news bulletin on the crisis in Europe actually interrupted *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* presentation of "Sherlock Holmes." Welles took these realistic elements and created a powerfully effective technique.



Welles on the phone the day after the broadcast, his desk covered by newspapers reporting the panic it created

Welles directs the Mercury Theatre on the Air *actors.*

If Welles guessed at the effect his broadcast would have, he later hinted at his motives for doing it in 1955 on a BBC television special, *Orson Welles Sketchbook*, when he said:

> *We weren't as innocent as we meant to be when we did the Martian broadcast. We were fed up with the way in which everything that came over this new magic box, the radio, was being swallowed….So, in a*

An aerial view of Wilson farm, Grovers Mill, New Jersey, in 1938

way, our broadcast was an assault on the credibility of that machine. We wanted people to understand that they shouldn't take any opinion predigested and they shouldn't swallow everything that came through the tap, whether it was radio or not.

Media Confusion

For three days, the future of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* was up in the air. CBS couldn't figure out whether they were scoundrels or heroes. The broadcast dominated the newspapers for days, with stories of panic, editorials alternately condemning and praising Welles, and even cartoons satirizing the whole affair.

The day after the broadcast, reporters descended on Grovers Mill, the scene of the "landing." Although the fictional farmer who was interviewed in the radio play, whose farm received the first Martian capsule, was named Wilmuth, the reporters did find a real Wilson farm that was close enough. Changing it from Wilmuth to Wilson conveniently gave them a site to photograph "where the Martians landed."

"There were headlines about lawsuits totaling some $12 million," Welles later recalled. "Most of them, as it turned out, existed in the fevered imagination of the newspapers. They'd been losing all that advertising to radio, so here, they reckoned, was a lovely chance to strike back. For a few days, I was a combination Benedict Arnold and John Wilkes Booth. But people were laughing much too hard, thank God—and pretty soon the papers had to quit."

CBS issued a public apology and promised not to "use the technique of a simulated news broadcast within a dramatization when the circumstances of the broadcast could cause immediate alarm to numbers of listeners." Of the claims against CBS and Orson Welles, none was substantiated or settled save one, made by George Bates, an unskilled laborer from Massachusetts, who wrote a letter to Welles shortly after the broadcast:

> *When those things landed, I thought the best thing to do was go away, so I took $3.25 out of my savings and bought a ticket. After I had gone sixty miles I heard it was a play. Now I don't have any money left for the shoes I was saving up for. Would you please have someone send me a pair of black shoes, size 9-B.*

Grovers Mill townsfolk discuss the previous night's broadcast.

It Seems to Me

By Heywood Broun

I'm still scared. I didn't hear the broadcast, and I doubt that I would have added up the police to complain, merely because I heard that men from a strange machine were knocking the daylights out of Princeton. That doesn't happen to be news this season. My first reaction would have been, "That's no Martian, but merely McDonald, of Harvard, carrying the ball on what the coaches call a 'naked reverse' or Daily Rand shift."

Just the same, I live in terror that almost any time now a metal cylinder will come to earth, and out of it will step fearsome creatures carrying death ray guns. And their faces will be forbidding, because the next radio invasion is likely to be an expedition of the censors.

Obviously, Orson Welles put too much reality on the radio waves, but there isn't a chance on earth that any chain will question such a stunt again. In fact, I think it would be an excellent rule to make

Maybe a Socialist State.

According to such astronomy as I have picked up

Over the objections of his lawyers, Welles honored the request.

Among those who praised Welles was influential *New York Tribune* columnist Dorothy Thompson, who wrote, "…far from blaming Mr. Orson Welles, he ought to be given a Congressional medal and a national prize for having made the most amazing and important contributions to the social sciences." She added,"They have cast a brilliant and cruel light upon the failure of popular education. They have shown up the incredible stupidity, lack of nerve, and ignorance of thousands."

Hugh S. Johnson wrote, "There are no men on Mars. If there were there would be no occasion for their attack on earth. If there were such an occasion, there is no reason to believe that in Mars, or anywhere else, there are weapons that could devastate a state or two in fifteen minutes." H.G. Wells foresaw a Martian technology centuries ahead of our own, but Johnson couldn't imagine human technology a mere seven years off.

Heywood Broun, echoing the sentiments of many in the media, warned, "I live in terror that almost any time now a metal cylinder will come to earth, and out of it will step fearsome creatures carrying death ray guns. And their faces will be forbidding, because the next radio invasion is likely to be an expedition of the censors."

Censorship and government control of what content was broadcast over the airwaves was a hallmark of

"Mars Panic" Useful

By Hugh S. Johnson

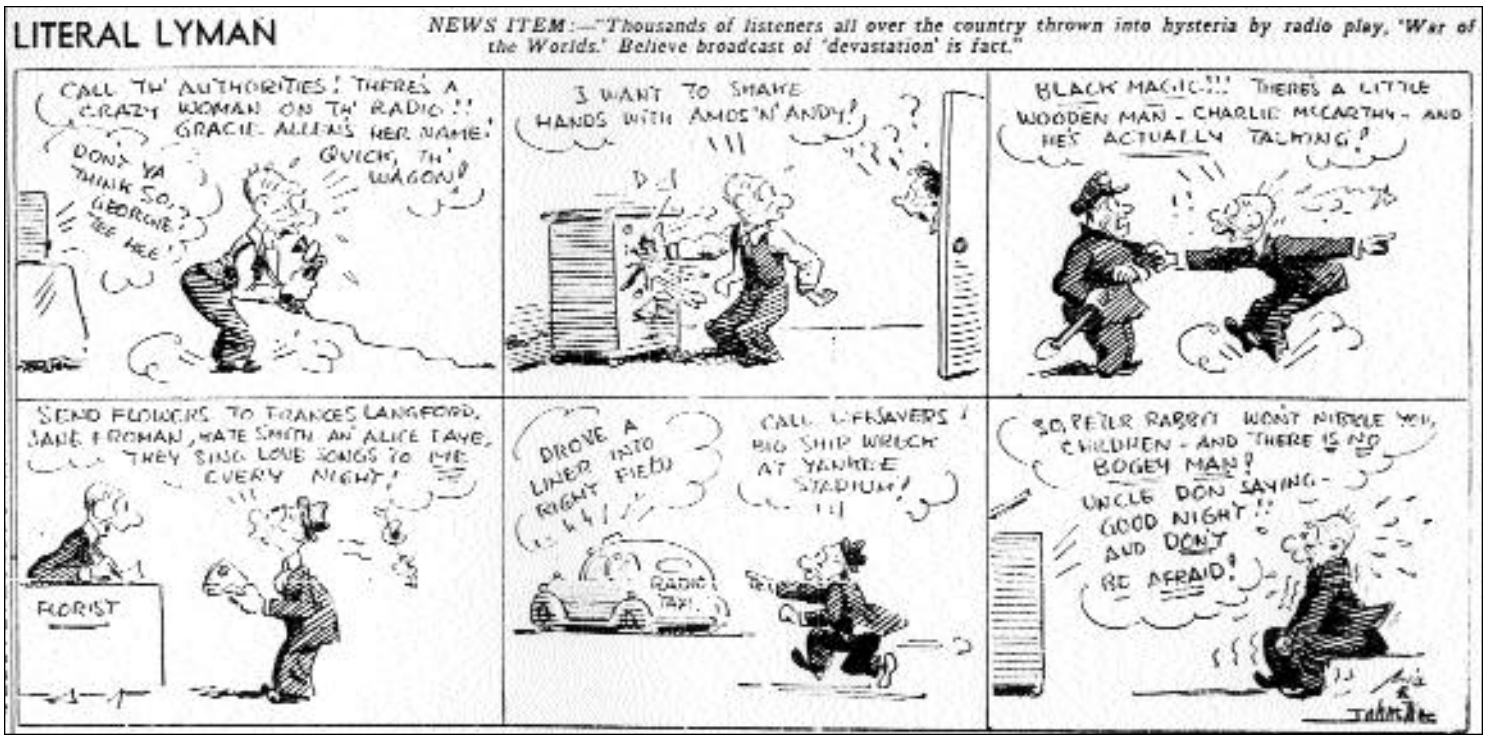
WASHINGTON, Nov. 2. One of the most remarkable demonstrations of modern times was the startling effect of the absurd radio scenario of Orson Welles based on an old Jules Verne type of novel by H. G. Wells—"The War of the Worlds."

Simulated Columbia broadcast radio flashes of a pretended attack with mysterious new aerial weapons on New Jersey from the planet Mars, put many people into such a panic that the witch-burning Mr. McNinch, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, has a new excuse to extend the creeping hand of government restriction of free speech by way of radio censorship.

When the hysterical echoes of an initial hysterical explosion die down the whole incident will assay out as about the silliest teapot tempest in human history.

There are no men on Mars. If there were there would be no occasion for their attack on earth. If there were such an occasion there is no reason to believe that in Mars, or anywhere else, there are weapons that could devastate a State or two in fifteen minutes. The result of public panic was so absurd as to be

Aid to Defense Program.



fascist regimes. This, as many were finding out, was a slippery slope to start down. "No political body must ever, under any circumstances, obtain a monopoly of radio," said Dorothy Thompson. "The power of mass suggestion is the most potent force today....If people can be frightened out of their wits by mythical men from Mars, they can be frightened into fanaticism by the fear of Reds, or convinced that America is in the hands of sixty families, or aroused to revenge against any minority, or terrorized into subservience to leadership because of any imaginable menace."

Within days, most of the alarmist reactions condemning the broadcast, as well as the serious ones praising it, gave way to parodies lampooning the gullibility of the listeners who fell for it.

Other Counties Heard From

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Frank R. McNinch received 644 pieces of mail about the broadcast, about 40 percent favorable and 60 percent unfavorable. Although the FCC studied the matter, it took no action, except to say that it was "regrettable." The responses varied from condemning Welles as some kind of sadistic monster to applauding his broadcast as if it were a heroic deed. Those who applauded enjoyed pointing their fingers at the "idiotic display of feeblemindedness brought about by Mr. Orson Welles' very fine production..." and complained, "What a bunch of jitterbug softies the people of America have turned out to be." For those whose reaction was unfavorable, the hostility and bile brought forth for Welles seemed quite personal. This letter, addressed to Welles, came from A.G. Kennedy, a judge from South Carolina:

> Your radio performance Sunday evening was a clear demonstration of your inhuman instincts, beastial [sic] sensuality and fendish [sic] joy in causing distress and suffering. Your savage ancestors, of which you are a degenerate offspring, exulted in torturing their enemies and war captives, and you doubtless revelled in feindish [sic] delight in causing death to some and great terror, anguish and suffering to thousands of helpless and unoffending victims of your hellish designs.
>
> Your contemptable [sic], cowardly, and cruel undertaking, conceived by a demon and executed by a cowardly cur is doubtless in keeping with your sense of humor. When you are faced with the enormity of your heinous crime and are liable to prosecution for you [sic] atrocious conduct and that you are morally guilty of murder if not legally guilty, then you fawn and whimper like a cringing cowardly entrapped wolf when apprehended in its wicked acts of destruction....
>
> I would not insult a female dog by calling you a son of such an animal. Your conduct was beneath the social standing of and what would be unbecoming and below the moral perception of a bastard son of a fatherless whore....You, if you were not a carbuncle on the rump of a degenerate theatrical performers [sic], would as an effort towards making partial amends for your consumate [sic] act of asininity, never again appear on the stage or before the radio, except for the purpose of announcing your withdrawal....
>
> I hope suit will be brought against you individually, the Company which you represent, and also the Columbia Broadcasting Company, for your combined wrong. I also purpose [sic] to use the radio in appealing to the American people to boycott the Columbia Broadcasting System in an expression of their disapproval of your disgraceful, fraudulent,atrocious, malicious, and illegal performance....

Europa.

Guess Whom the Nazis Blame for Mars Skit

By the United Press.

BERLIN, Nov. 2.—The Nazi party newspaper organ, the Voelkischer Boebachter, blamed Jews today for the war scare caused in the United States Sunday night by a dramatized version of H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds."

In 1933 Hitler authorized Miss

From the front page of the New York World-Telegram, *November 2, 1938*

H.G. Wells' initial reaction to the broadcast was less than euphoric.

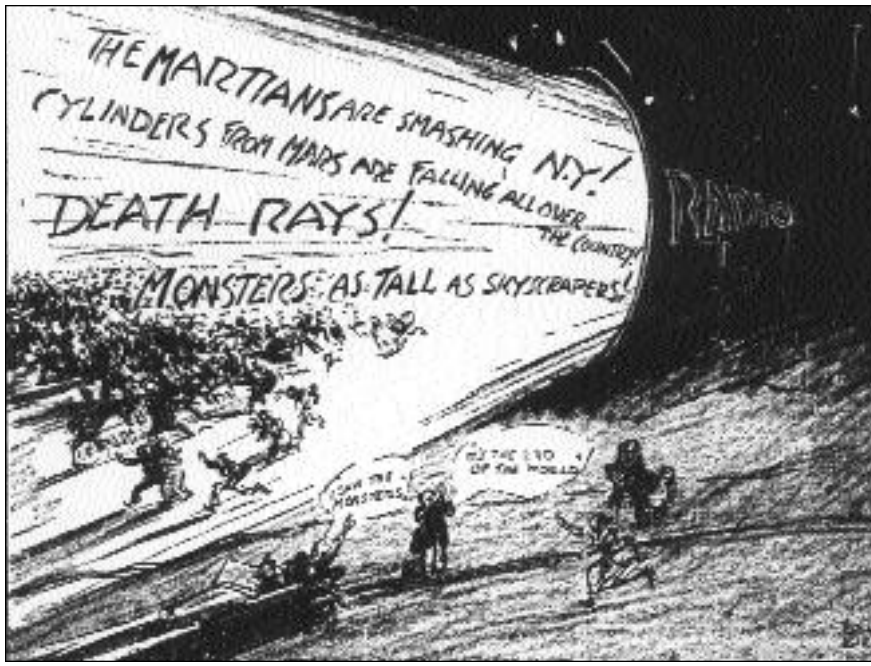
Interestingly, Harry Wright Jr. wrote of his nine-year-old son's reaction upon learning that some people took the broadcast literally: "…his comment was that those people must have been 'dumb-bells' to have been scared by such a program. Perhaps, a person of mature age might have put it differently." One such mature adult wrote that the broadcast "caused a number of sub-morons to become panic stricken. This is no reason why intelligent people should be deprived of virile entertainment." Perhaps, as one letter-writer suggests, those who were fooled and lashed out at Welles and CBS were just over-compensating. "It seems to me obvious," wrote Lydel Sims to McNinch, "that, realizing their stupidity and desiring to save their faces, they are taking it out on Mr. Welles and the CBS."

Meanwhile, in England, H.G. Wells was not amused. According to correspondence between Wells and CBS prior to and after the broadcast, an "adaptation" of his work was never mentioned. Wells thought they were simply going to read his book on the air. "The dramatization was made with a liberty that amounts to a complete rewriting and made the novel an entirely different story," said Wells. "It's a total unwarranted liberty." He went on to say, "It was my understanding with the broadcasting company that the broadcast should be presented as fiction and not as news. I gave no permission whatever for alterations which might lead to the belief that it was real news." Although H.G. Wells was at first perturbed by Orson Welles' youthful impudence, he soon mellowed, as sales of *The War of the Worlds*—one of his lesser-known novels—soared as a result of the attention generated by the broadcast. (When H.G. met Orson two years later in a San Antonio radio studio [see part III, "H.G. Wells"], he took an immediate liking to the younger Welles.)

Welles received this message in a telegram from his friend, *New York Times* drama critic Alexander Wolcott (although sometimes it was from President Roosevelt, depending on whom Welles was telling the story to): "This only goes to prove, my beamish boy, that all the intelligent people were listening to the dummy [Charlie McCarthy], and that all the dummies were listening to you."

Mercury's Legacy

The night of the broadcast, according to Koch, the switchboard supervisor at CBS overheard one of her



John Houseman collaborated with Orson Welles until parting ways in 1940.

operators say, very politely, "I'm sorry, we haven't that information here." The supervisor, responsible for instituting a new policy to provide more courteous customer service, said,"That was very nicely spoken. What did the party ask?" The operator replied,"He wanted to know if the world was coming to an end."

Besides the swarm of lawsuits against CBS, Welles, and the Mercury Theatre, the world did not come to an end. The lawsuits were dismissed (no precedent existed for which to hold them liable), and The Mercury Theatre, Welles, and Koch became instant stars. *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* got the one thing it never managed to before—a sponsor. "The sponsor had turned us down two weeks before because we tended to too much violence and sensationalism," said Welles. "[They] picked us up the week after 'The War of the Worlds.' Thanks to the Martians, we got us a radio sponsor, and suddenly we were a big commercial program, right up there with Benny, Burns and Allen, and Lux Radio Theatre with Cecil B. DeMille. The next stop was Hollywood." As John Houseman so succinctly put it years later, "They [Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy] may have had the thirty-four rating, but *we* caused the panic."

Mercury, with its new sponsor, Campbell's, became *The Campbell Playhouse* on December 9, 1938, debuting with an adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. "I guess they figured if Orson could make 'The War of the Worlds' credible and the Martians credible," said Houseman, "he could make Campbell's chicken soup credible." *The Campbell Playhouse*, which Houseman and Welles continued to produce, put on first-rate radio dramas until 1940.

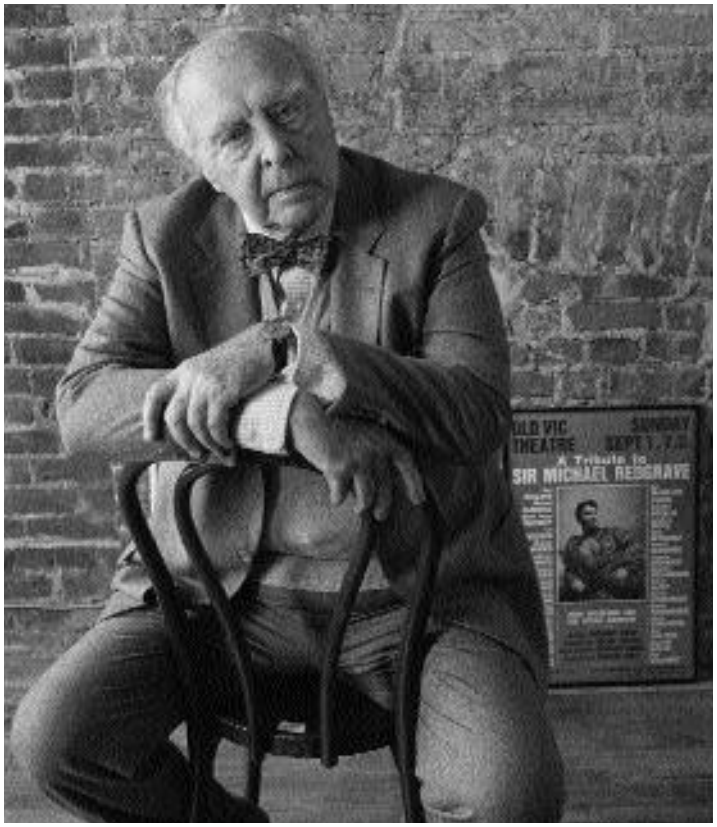
Welles, signed by RKO to a multi-picture deal and given an unprecedented amount of control, went on to direct and star in *Citizen Kane*, released in 1941. It is still regarded by film critics as one of the greatest, most innovative films ever made. It was nominated in nine categories at the 1942 Academy Awards, but won only one Oscar, thanks in no small part to the influence of

Welles continued to direct and star in The Campbell Playhouse *on CBS, even after he began shooting* Citizen Kane.

William Randolph Hearst, the film's thinly-fictionalized central figure. Welles and Herman Mankiewicz won for Best Screenplay, beating out, among others, Howard Koch for *Sergeant York*. Koch had been hired by Warner Brothers studio shortly after the "War of the Worlds" broadcast. Although his old taskmaster bested him for the gold statue in '42, Koch did earn an Oscar in 1944 for the adapted screenplay he and Julius Epstein wrote for *Casablanca*.

Welles was never happy with Koch getting credit for the script on "The War of the Worlds." In correspondence with Hadley Cantril, who was working on his famous study of the broadcast, *Invasion from Mars*, Welles complained bitterly and repeatedly that he, and not Koch, deserved credit for the radio play script. Cantril pointed out that Koch also claimed authorship and had sent affadavits to this effect. In the opening to the broadcast, Koch had written, "The Columbia Broadcasting System and its affiliated stations present Orson Welles and *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* in a radio play by Howard Koch suggested by the H.G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds*." By air time, however, Welles instructed announcer Dan Seymour to omit any reference to Koch in the introduction. And that's how it went out over the air. But, in the end, Koch retained copyright in the work.

Howard Koch, in 1944, accepting an Oscar for his screenplay for Casablanca.



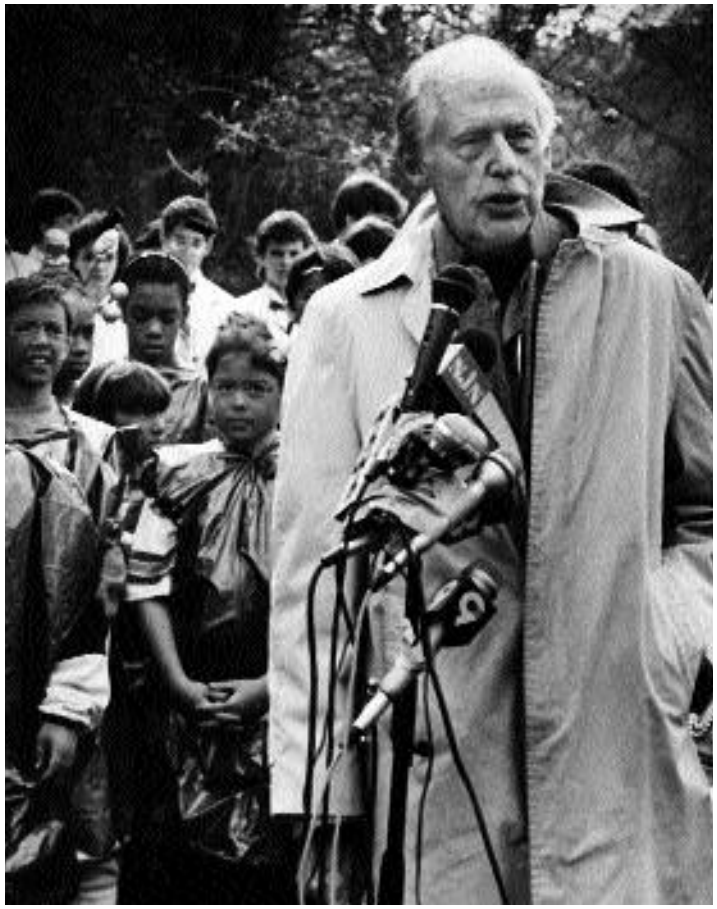
Houseman, who worked in the theater for years behind the scenes, achieved fame in his seventies, as the crusty Professor Kingsfield in The Paper Chase.

John Houseman continued to work with Welles on *Citizen Kane*, but parted ways with the temperamental boy genius after an irreconcilable row. According to Mercury actress Geraldine Fitzgerald, Houseman told her, "Well, I didn't mind him throwing a table at me, but when he sets fire to the tablecloth first, and then throws it—then I mind." Houseman worked under David O. Selznick in Hollywood, but soon left to join a wartime propaganda program that would become the Voice of America, which he later headed. Of course, Houseman would gain most fame for his role as the crusty law professor, Charles Kingsfield, in the movie and television series *The Paper Chase*.

Grovers Mill Revisited

For years, many residents of the Grovers Mill area preferred not to talk about the events of October 30, 1938. A combination of embarrassment and just plain sick-and-tired-of-hearing-it was the prevailing attitude. By 1988, however, fifty years after the non-landing of the Martians, locals had developed a different view. A "War of the Worlds Committee" was formed by West Windsor mayor Doug Forrester, who spearheaded the four-day 50th Anniversary celebration from October 27 to 30, which included a juried art show, Martian costume contest, dinner dance, panel discussions on "Could It Happen Again?" and "Should We Go to Mars?" a rereading of the original Koch script at Princeton's McCarter Theater, and the "Martian Panic 10K Run." Howard Koch returned to the scene of his crime, accompanied by a slew of local, national, and international media there to cover the event. A time capsule was buried, to be opened on the hundredth anniversary in 2038, and a monument was installed to mark the spot of the capsule and the place where the Martians "landed." A similar celebration took place to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary in 1998, and the Sci-Fi Channel presented its own tribute to the broadcast and the part that Grovers Mill played in it. *Martian Mania*, hosted by director James Cameron, aired on October 30, 1998. It seems the people in the Grovers Mill area have come to embrace their unique place in history, even if it is as the site of an event that never actually took place.

A monument to the broadcast, in Grovers Mill, marks the spot where a time capsule was buried in 1988.



Howard Koch was invited to Grovers Mill in 1987 for the forty-ninth anniversary of the broadcast, and returned in 1988 for the fiftieth.

H H H

The eve of Halloween, 1938, was one of those moments that signaled an imperceptible shift in society. The days that followed found an America a little less innocent, not quite so naïve and trusting, a little more skeptical. Like the quiz show scandal of the 1950s and, later, Watergate, Americans were forced to grow up like the child who discovers there is no tooth fairy, no Easter Bunny.

Hadley Cantril's study of the causes of the panic, published in *Invasion from Mars*, identified some predictable reasons. A lack of critical ability was perhaps the most obvious one. Another reason suggested was the presence of a set of beliefs that were consistent with what was described on the radio—apocalyptic religious beliefs, a fear of technology, or simply the expectation that the world was headed toward disaster. The widespread feeling that things were out of control, that individuals no longer had any control over what happened to them no doubt exacerbated the panic reaction.

"Particularly since the depression of 1929," wrote Cantril, "a number of people have begun to wonder whether or not they will ever regain any sense of economic security. The complexity of modern finance and government, the discrepancies shown in the economic and political proposals of the various 'experts,' the felt threats of Fascism, Communism, prolonged unemployment among millions of Americans—these together with a thousand and one other characteristics of modern living—create an environment which the average individual is completely unable to interpret."

War of the Worlds 50th Anniversary T-shirt

Present-day Grovers Mill

Technology rushes ahead of our ability to understand it; political and economic factors epitomize complexity. We understand these conditions as givens. But in 1938, people were just beginning to get it:

> *Things have happened so thick and fast since my grandfather's day that we can't hope to know what might happen now. I am all balled up.*

> *So many odd things are happening in the world. Science has progressed so far that we don't know how far it might have gone on Mars. The way the world runs ahead, anything is possible.*

Orson Welles, with his Mercury Theatre actors and writers, applied his particular genius to a prophetic work by H.G. Wells. And on October 30, 1938, the results of their efforts changed the mental landscape of America and the world for years to come.